



Erik Poulsen

Washington State Senator

Spring 2005

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Sen. Erik Poulsen represents the 34th Legislative District, which encompasses West Seattle, Burien and Vashon Island. He is chair of the Water, Energy & Environment Committee, vice chair of the Transportation Committee and a member of the Health & Long-Term Care Committee.

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for the great honor of representing you in Olympia – and for all the calls, letters and e-mails you sent me in support of my work and the issues you care about. Your participation in the political process is absolutely vital.

This was a historic legislative session, marked by huge victories for the environment, for kids and education, transportation, health care and especially the taxpayers. We passed a progressive, responsible state budget without any general tax increases.

A personal highlight was passage of my “clean car” legislation. By adopting tougher emission standards for new cars like California and seven other states have done, we’ll reduce pollution, improve public health and combat global warming. These new cars will be more fuel-efficient and consumers will have more vehicle choices. And the law completely phases out those aggravating emissions tests.

Another milestone was passage of my “green buildings” bill, making Washington the first state to require that schools, universities and other public structures be built to meet energy efficiency, water conservation and other environmental standards. Legislation I’ve been working on for years to promote solar energy also passed into law.

My greatest disappointment was the failure – by just a single vote – of a measure that would have prohibited discrimination in housing, lending and employment based on sexual orientation. This legislation, which I have been championing since I was first elected, is not about gay marriage. It is a matter of basic fairness that I vow to keep fighting for.

Again, many thanks for the privilege of serving as your senator. Enclosed you’ll find more information about the legislative session and how I voted on key issues. Please keep in touch – your feedback is important to me.

Respectfully,

Erik Poulsen
State Senator

A Report to the 34th District

Spring 2005



Transportation: Getting there safely.

This year I served as Vice Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee. The transportation financing package we passed is the biggest investment in our state's infrastructure ever. It will create over 35,000 new jobs and help speed up our economic recovery.

The most dangerous stretches of highway and killer intersections will be improved. Some of the worst traffic bottlenecks are addressed. And I fought for funding to take cars and trucks off the road: freight and passenger rail, park and ride lots, and better commuter bus service.

Alaskan Way Viaduct

Every day more than 110,000 cars travel the Alaskan Way Viaduct. Experts agree that a major earthquake could bring it crashing down – it's a matter of when, not if.

Late in the session, I and other Seattle legislators made it clear we wouldn't go home without funding to fix the viaduct. Our strategy paid off: on the very last day of session we passed the transportation financing package which includes a \$2 billion down payment for replacing the viaduct.

Now the federal government and the Regional Transportation Investment District must step up to the plate with additional funding needed to complete the project.



Ferries

Vashon's passenger-only ferry service will continue to be operated by Washington State Ferries for another two years.

This service is a lifeline for people who travel to downtown Seattle for work, school, health care and other needs. It keeps thousands of cars out of Fauntleroy and West Seattle.

It's always a battle to fund passenger ferries. Some people in Olympia believe it should be run by a transit agency like King County Metro, which is studying the feasibility of offering passenger ferry service. I've always contended that a fully integrated ferry system run by the state makes the most sense.

However, passenger ferries were once funded by the motor vehicle excise tax, which was severely diminished when voters approved Initiative 695. So we no longer have a stable, predictable source of funding for this service. If Metro or a public-private partnership can offer financial certainty and better service, let's explore it.

Potholes and local priorities

Another important facet of this transportation package is the \$1 billion going to cities and counties to address dangerous intersections, damaged roadways and traffic bottlenecks.

Every jurisdiction will get direct funding and grants for road improvements, public transit, rail upgrades and freight mobility. This package is a real boost for local government, and demonstrates a new sense of partnership between the state, our cities and counties.



Reasonable user fees

All these great transportation projects will be financed through reasonable user fees. The 9.5 cent increase in the gas tax will be phased in slowly over the next four years, along with small annual weight fees on passenger vehicles. The cost to the average driver will be around \$6 a month.

We built strict accountability into this plan, including independent performance audits that will continually gauge whether projects are on time and on budget.

Fighting for the environment



Gov. Christine Gregoire signed my "Green Buildings" bill into law at Washington Middle School in Olympia. Every school, university and other public building constructed with state money must be built to meet standards for environmental responsibility. This law is the first of its kind in the nation.

Clean cars

Vehicle emissions produce more than half the pollutants that dirty our atmosphere. As our population grows and industry expands, we risk exceeding federal clean air standards – which comes at a very high price. Existing businesses in our state would be required to make expensive upgrades to emission-control equipment, it would be more costly to locate new businesses here, and we'd be denied significant federal transportation funding. We simply can't afford it.

That's why I championed the "clean car" bill – to protect jobs and the economy, to combat asthma and other respiratory diseases, and to ensure that out-of-state auto manufacturers are doing their part to improve the environment.

With the passage of this legislation, Washington becomes the ninth state to adopt tougher emission standards for new cars. These cars get considerably better gas mileage, saving you money at the

pump and reducing our dependence on foreign oil. The bill also phases out mandatory vehicle emissions testing at renewal.

Green buildings

Washington is the very first state to pass "Green Buildings" legislation. My bill requires that public buildings be constructed using standards adopted by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.

Green buildings use innovative materials and construction methods to reduce impacts on the environment. They are built using recycled materials and locally grown wood products. And through energy and water efficiencies, they cost less to operate.

Green buildings are better places to teach our children – research shows that kids get better grades when they learn in classrooms with natural daylight and natural ventilation. People who work in

green buildings are healthier and more productive, too.

Incentives for renewable energy

I also authored landmark legislation to encourage the manufacture and production of renewable energy in Washington. It's a great example of the economy and environment working hand-in-hand.

The bill establishes a \$2,000 incentive for individuals, businesses or local governments to invest in renewable power generation. Small-scale windmill, solar panel and other alternative energy projects are beginning to spring up around the state. During the recent renovation of the Legislative Building in Olympia, for example, solar panels were installed to charge batteries used to light the Capitol dome at night. If we make the right kinds of investments in renewable power generation, we can develop new technologies and create whole new industries while improving our environment.

The state budget – supporting your priorities

K-12 education

Kids and schools have always been my top priority – and they're our paramount Constitutional duty. School funding has been on the decline for years. I insisted that we reverse that trend before agreeing to support the budget.

This year's budget represents a 10 percent increase in K-12 education funding, including ample resources so that every student can achieve academic success and fair compensation for school employees. We reinstated the voter-approved initiatives to lower class sizes and retain excellent teachers, expanded the successful Learning Assistance and Readiness to Learn programs, and boosted funding for school construction.



Higher education

It was my goal this session that no one in Washington be denied an education because of lack of space at our colleges and universities. I was proud to vote for an education budget that provides 7,900 additional higher education enrollment slots. The budget also boosts the number of students eligible for financial aid. And we start to address fairness for many part-time faculty members at community and technical colleges who are paid far less than full-time faculty, yet often work similar hours.

Children's health care

This year, we reversed the trend of cutting kids off health care. In 2003, the Republican-controlled Senate made a number of policy and funding decisions that resulted in the loss of health care for an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 children. We set in motion a plan that will assure all children in our state have health care coverage by 2010.

I fought to eliminate the premiums for children's health coverage, as well as the administrative hassles that were keeping many children from maintaining enrollment. We also provided sufficient funding to allow 9,000 immigrant children to receive coverage through a state-only funded Medicaid program. Currently, through Medicaid, the state provides health care to about 550,000 children.

In this year's budget, we also maintain coverage for 100,000 adults in the Basic Health Plan and refrained from imposing medication and transportation co-pays for Medicaid clients.



Mental health parity

It was a long time coming, but we finally achieved fairness in insurance coverage for those suffering from mental health disorders. In our state, insurance coverage for mental health has not been on par with other medical care. Co-pays and deductibles for mental health services are higher and there are often limits on the number of times a patient can see a therapist or go to a hospital.

Under the new law, health insurers must provide the same annual or lifetime dollar limits, the same co-payments, deductibles, coinsurance, out-of-pocket maximums, and doctor visit limits for mental health services as for other health services. More than 30 states have already approved this kind of legislation, and experience shows that premiums go up by less than 1 percent as a result. Our area is home to a leading nonprofit provider, Highline Mental Health, which has been a tireless advocate for those suffering from mental and emotional illnesses.

Bills I supported that passed

SAVING HOOD CANAL

New rehabilitation zones will focus the work of state and local agencies and nonprofits where shellfish, salmon and other aquatic life have been most damaged by commercial and residential development.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION CORPS

Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with post traumatic stress disorder from their combat experience will get the rehabilitative services they need as they participate in salmon habitat restoration projects.

OIL SPILL ADVISORY COUNCIL

This citizens' council, which is not dominated by the oil industry, will review environmental safety issues to enhance oil spill prevention and ensure a rapid response.

PERFORMANCE AUDITS

Independent auditors will ensure that State agencies operate efficiently, respond to their customers' needs, provide quality services, and comply with laws and regulations.

ELECTION REFORMS

In response to inconsistencies in vote-counting procedures, confusion about provisional ballots, and concern about the voting rights of military service personnel, we passed a series of bills that refine the process, but did not erect new barriers against legitimate voters.



ANIMAL NEGLECT

Existing animal cruelty statutes are updated to include felony penalties for starvation, dehydration and suffocation of an animal, as well as dog fighting and rooster fighting.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Using federal unemployment taxes to reverse the 2003 benefit cut for temporary workers in agriculture and fishing, unemployment compensation is enhanced while minimizing the impact on businesses.

Bills I supported that did not pass

I will continue to advocate for these ideas

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Building on existing federal law, a state insurance program would provide \$250 a week for five weeks while a worker cares for a newborn or sick family member – all for the cost of 2 cents an hour per worker.

SIMPLE MAJORITY SCHOOL LEVIES

Voters deserve the opportunity to decide whether school levies must still pass by 60 percent, but first the Legislature must pass this resolution to put the question on a statewide ballot.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Stem cell research may uncover treatments for Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, juvenile diabetes and spinal cord injuries. We should encourage this innovative research, while prohibiting reproductive cloning, the creation of new human beings.

MEDICAL MALPRACTICE

This proposal would have established a "three strikes" provision for sub-par health care providers, whistle blower protections for health care professionals who report misconduct and a voluntary binding arbitration system with a \$1 million cap on damages.

TOXIC FIRE RETARDANTS

Children can get neurological disorders from chemicals called PBDEs that are found in furniture, carpet pads, computers and other household items and accumulate in the human body, even in breast milk. Legislation to prohibit their use failed, but I did secure \$1.4 million in the budget to begin clean up efforts.

MERCURY IN VEHICLES

Mercury also causes serious health problems in young children, and older autos contain mercury in switches and other components. Manufacturers should remove mercury-contaminated components from scrap vehicles.

Strengthening our community

Each year, the Legislature identifies key investments to improve the quality of life in our community, protect vulnerable natural areas and enhance higher education for our students – it's all about creating the kind of state in which we all want to live.

The Capital Budget, as it's called, relies on the sale of general obligation bonds. I was able to secure funding for several vital projects in our area. Many deserving projects did not win the support of the Legislature, but I'll keep fighting for them in next year's budget.

- **Sound Way green space.** The budget earmarks \$500,000 to help preserve seven acres of Seattle's rare remaining undeveloped land. The property is part of the Duwamish Greenbelt that protects the Riverview neighborhood and South Seattle Community College. It's a beautiful native ecosystem that provides a buffer to air and noise pollution. If we don't save this green space now, it will be gone forever to commercial development. I will continue to work with the Nature Consortium and the Sound Way Preservation Committee to find the remaining funds for the project before their September deadline.
- **Three Projects/One Community.** An innovative community resource center brings together a mix of services for families in need: the West Seattle food bank, historic Cooper cultural arts center and Croft Place town homes, which will provide both short-term emergency services and transformational services to help low-income families climb out of desperate situations.
I secured \$500,000 in state funding that will work hand in hand with other public and private funding. An additional \$500,000 was awarded for the renovation of Cooper School in the state's Building for the Arts program.
- **Greenbridge at White Center.** The budget includes \$200,000 for the Greenbridge project in White Center. This innovative public housing project will be an asset to our city, and I am proud to say the state will be providing some funding this year for the community plaza at the development.
- **Burien Town Square.** This new downtown area is a \$120 million public-private partnership that will include a transportation hub, housing units, retail space, city offices, a library, theaters and a public square. The development will help offset the loss of property value in the wake of the SeaTac third runway construction. The budget provides \$2 million in state funding for this exciting project.
- **Chautauqua Elementary School.** Vashon Island's only public elementary school suffered structural deterioration and air quality problems. The Vashon Island School District has undertaken a multi-million-dollar project to remove moldy building materials and prevent water from seeping in to the building. The budget provides \$261,000 to assist the school district in this work.

2005 Legislative Report

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